

## **Here I Am: Understanding and Shining My Inner Light – Epistle from 2008 annual sessions**

*“And the trees of the field, they clap their hands, as we go forth with joy.”*

Greetings from the 2008 Northern Yearly Meeting annual sessions at the Lions Camp in Rosholt, Wisconsin, where apple trees are blossoming late, pine forests greet the rising sun with gentle, vibrant energy, and the spring weather is as perfect as sub-luminary bliss can make it.

Youth, youth, youth! We are a young yearly meeting, scarce thirty. Yet, until this century began to seem familiar, greying heads overwhelmingly predominated. Recently, this domination has morphed to the spiky dos of our young people. While older Friends form the strong warp of our gathering, children and youth, about 106 out of the 310 total number, bind its colorful, multi-textured weft. Exuberance is the watchword.

As younger Friends play frisbee on the lawn, older Friends tending to Quaker business look out on the pink crabapple petals that fall in the wind. Letting go, ... letting go, .... Such beauty is an aid to ground us in Spirit and bring our labors to unity in covered worship.

Our business process skills mature and the grasp of Divine will for us becomes more ready. Some aspects of our process are hidden treasures -like those in the story our visiting Friends from El Salvador Yearly Meeting, told during the worship they led Saturday.

Spiritual gifts and the joy and responsibilities they bring as we respond to Divine leadings and nudges play recurring motifs. We gratefully support and hold in our prayers Northern Friends traveling in ministry as far afield as El Salvador and Rwanda. Committees and individuals reporting on concerns are also growing in good Quaker process: thorough preparation and spiritual readiness make business run more smoothly. We consider many of the same subjects each year and have more Faith and Practice chapters to labor with, but seasoned minds and hearts are turned by new revelation, and the fresh perspective added to our work allows us to garner a deeper meaning within it. We flow within a convergence of diverse perspectives and find that, in this rich space, we are of one spirit. We seem bathed in a new light, with new shadows, angles, and beams. What truth do we reflect off each other?

In our plenary, three Friends shared journeys of being led and finding a path to faithfulness: one, to work on race and class justice and the second, to build a house that was “just enough” –in deep communion with his partner. The third, a younger Friend, related her experience as a white person, working in “the most segregated city in America” (Milwaukee) and shared her Slam poetry with us. Then, in small groups, we told each other our stories and discovered that the diversity of our leadings is immense. Further, Divine imperatives come with various intensities and characters, and have different speeds and trajectories of approaching maximum clarity. How do we discern when we are being given a direct order from God? What are the signs of way opening? When are apparent barriers signposts to right action? When do our emotions distract us and when are they friendly aides to clarity as we step into the unknown? Some concerns may be passive and in sync with one’s life, allowing us to maintain familiar ties and community connections. In other cases: “I don’t know what this light’s for, or what it means to me or anyone else, I don’t know what gifts I’ve been given, or how to make myself clear now, or make myself known. But today I wrote a poem.”

As Quakers, we help guide each other by speaking of our individual and corporate experience of the Divine. Initially abstract queries about Inner Light and Leadings become incarnate in the stories-of disagreeing with the farmer across the road or being the only white person attending the gathering of African-American women. We remember the stories and live in the light of them.

Some of the uproar of applause during our Sunday talent show in The Hollow was the sound of mosquito swatting. But we basked in the grace, good humor, and comradeship of song, dance, and spoken word. The MC’s and most of the performers were younger Friends, sharing their gifts while bathed in the pale, green light of new leaves. Who knew that a Dr. Seuss story would make a perfect rap song? Or that there is a tale of George Fox on the Yellow Brick Road? Mother and daughter sing in harmony; Earthquakers quake; and the heels of Ireland grace our ears.

Our last evening brings thunder, lightening, heavy gales, and rain. A tent blows across the lake; two-score teens engage in an intense and emotional business meeting. In a cabin, there is chocolate graduation cake for all to share amid drumming, guitar sounds, card games, and conversation. As the humidity increases during the storm, Friends of all ages mingle in the dining room, El Salvadorans conversing with Northern Friends– a

solar engineer and a therapist– over a puzzle, fitness buffs examining leg tendons, and recreation seekers learning dominoes. The T-shirts worn encompass the planet.

We live a testimony of love and compassion as our Memorial Meeting for Worship lifts up names and memories of those we have lost from this life. We also rejoice in births and important life milestones. Some of us, once in the middle, are now elders, and we feel the weight of the torch of Fire we steward for a short space, making it ready to hand on to our youth. Spirit gathers among elders and the young who are the future and present of our faith. And “There are angels hovering round.”